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ABSTRACT

This publication describes efforts taken in Indiana to improve middle-grade education. The restructuring of the state's urban middle grades has been supported by Lilly Endowment Inc., which founded the Middle Grades Improvement Program (MGIP), 6 years ago. Despite the lack of an overall middle-grade theme in the state Department of Education and despite other barriers, the middle-grade restructuring movement has thrived at a grass-roots level. Chapter 1 offers a profile of Indiana students that illustrates the need for more child-centered education. Chapter 2 describes administrators' approaches to change and demonstrates the importance of good leadership in school restructuring. Chapters 3 and 4 offer suggestions for planning and building a supportive school environment. The fifth and sixth chapters describe team teaching strategies and ways to help children, particularly underserved students, understand their potential and plan their futures. Chapter 7 describes the need for a variety of strategies that address students' diverse needs. The final chapter describes new grassroots organizations that are broadening the impact of change. Appendices contain a glossary and a list of Middle Grades Improvement Network schools. (LMI)

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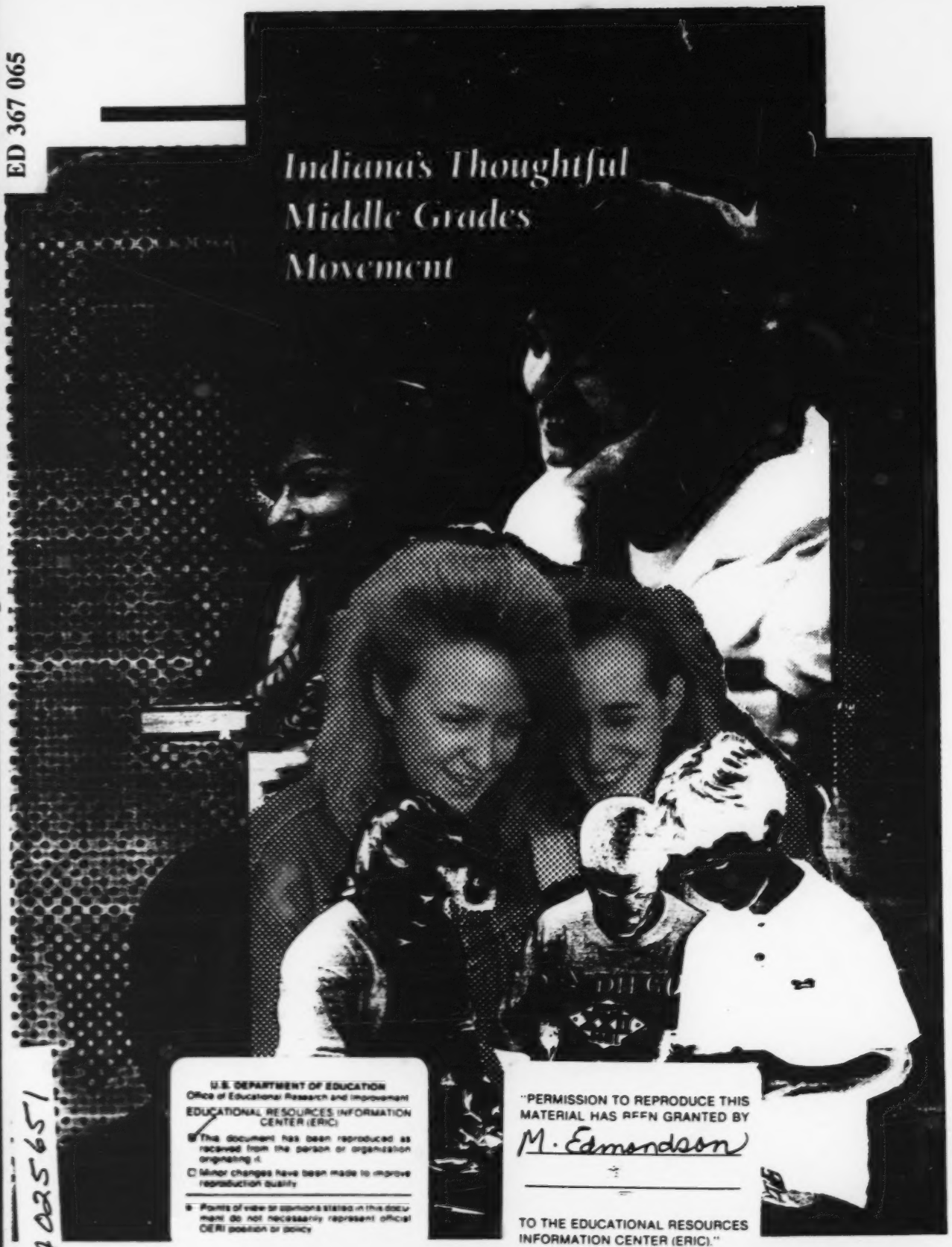
# *Indiana's Thoughtful Middle Grades Movement*



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# GENTLE AMBITIONS

## *Indiana's Thoughtful Middle Grades Movement*

by

**Gail Hinchion Mancini**

Anne C. Lewis, *editor*

A Report of the Education Writers Association

**We would like to thank the Lilly Endowment, Inc. whose assistance made this report possible.** The views and conclusions expressed in this report are based on the work of Gail Mancini and the staff of the Education Writers Association and are not necessarily those of the Endowment.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Gail Hinchion Mancini** is a freelance writer and former reporter with the *South Bend Tribune*, where she covered education for 10 years. A graduate of Indiana University's journalism school, she is also a journalism instructor at Indiana University in South Bend. As Indiana editor for EWA's *Indiana Strides*, she has been covering middle schools closely for several years.

## ABOUT THE EDITOR

**Anne C. Lewis** is an education policy writer in the Washington, D.C. area. She began her 30-year career in education writing as a reporter for the Corpus Christi (Tex.) *Caller-Times*. She served as editor of *Education USA* for 10 years and has been the Washington columnist for the *Phi Delta Kappan* for the last nine years. She works as a consulting editor with the Education Writers Association, editing both *High Strides* and *Indiana Strides*, among other publications.

# Meanwhile, Backstage...

To the trained eye, motions large and small tell the story. At the Indiana Middle Level Education Association's annual winter conference, teachers dash fleet-footed from one end of the conference center to the other, hungry for information on team teaching and block scheduling. Participants clamor to know: "What do you do when a teacher resists teaming?"

Heads huddle, teachers from different schools at opposite ends of the state compare notes. Principals from equally diverse geographic backgrounds meet and greet as though members of the same weekly handball league.

Throughout the meeting room, heads bob in acknowledgement as keynote speaker Nancy Doda jests that children feel so **watched** when they are assigned to teams. ("They're ganging up on us," Doda heard one child say.)

In evidence is a sense of common purpose; a collective spirit that cuts across geography and demography and straight through the four walls and lines of desks that are teachers' traditional domain.

Here gathered is a group that has pushed such exemplary middle grades practices as team teaching, interdisciplinary instruction, community outreach and advisor/advisee from experimental to common practice.

Hundreds of heretofore unrelated educators have pulled together, lending support to each other as they wait for their own central offices, and their state education leaders, to themselves undergo a transition.

## Indiana Idiosyncracies

Indiana is an unlikely setting for a middle grades renaissance. Consider the following:

- In the Indiana Department of Education (DOE), Betty Johnson, the top administrator involved in middle level change, explains that DOE personnel are not yet sensitized to the shape or importance of the middle grades movement. Until a middle grades theme takes hold within the various offices of DOE — until they develop what Johnson calls "a shared definition of middle schools" — it is difficult to believe the department will play a leadership role.

- Local superintendents' hiring needs and teachers' interest for broad-based certification have encouraged Indiana's colleges and universities to neglect teacher preparation for the middle grades. There is no state requirement that future middle level teachers have practical experience in middle level schools. In the college classroom, future middle level teachers are lumped in with

all secondary education teachers in content-specific programs. They may never hear mention of current methods for the academic inspiration of young adolescents.

- Indiana is a disconnected mix of urban, suburban and mostly rural areas that has operated forever under the belief that local control is best. This is true of most states, but in Indiana it has resulted in school boards inventing 23 different grade configurations to serve middle level age students. Meanwhile, the urge to make some radical change in statewide educational rules seems to strike only about every 10 or 15 years. The most recent wave of state leadership resulted in better funding for early elementary grades and a statewide student testing system whose accuracy and value, after more than five years, still is uncertain. In 1992, the State Board of Education struggled to eliminate the minutes-per-week prescriptions that apply to all subjects. These mandates have been a barrier to block scheduling and interdisciplinary instruction. When related arts teachers battled against this change — concerned that change would diminish their work or concerned that their curriculum would shrink — the state board approved a motion which retains the prescriptions but puts the decision to follow them in the hands of local school boards.



- Regard for local control may also explain why state leaders have such a small appetite for reflection on who Hoosiers are as a whole. Data collecting methods, although improving, are so poor that the estimate of the number of children in poverty is suspect. We have difficulty pinpointing an exact number of Hispanics in the state. We do not even count the number of students expelled and suspended from our schools. Making a policy argument that links middle grades restructuring to the needs of poor minority children, or to those who are academically disconnected, therefore, is difficult.

## On the Move, Nonetheless

Despite these and other handicaps, interest in middle grades change has increased rapidly in the last decade. Operating independently, or with the help of outside consultants, individual school districts are phasing in elements of exemplary middle grades schools.

Some are communities which demand cutting-edge facilities and programs; others are motivated by the sense that they are not reaching their children. Many participants from this field of independents have tied into the Indiana Middle Level Education Association, whose activities allow them a forum for describing the nature and importance of change. The IMLEA board has been comprised of what can fairly be called middle grades diehards. Besides working to provide educational opportunities, membership is beginning to constitute a political force for statewide attention to the middle grades.

The restructuring work of Indiana's urban middle grades have been supported by Lilly Endowment Inc., whose six-year-old Middle Grades Improvement Program (MGIP) has provided more than $6 million in support to schools with the greatest problems and the fewest resources to solve them.

In organizing MGIP, the Endowment can be credited with establishing a legacy on how to approach change. By nature, the MGIP project also represents an addition to the pool of middle school activists who constitute an

**Indiana's movement thrives backstage — slowly, often unnoticed, yet so thoroughly grounded that its shape is being built of stone.**

■

informal statewide support system. Working with IMLEA at all turns, MGIP participants have strengthened the call for change.

While there is no overall middle grades theme in the DOE, there is, within Betty Johnson's DOE division, a small effort to explore policy issues regarding middle schools.

Outgoing Indiana Superintendent H. Dean Evans organized a task force to address middle level issues, whose members comprised a small-scale "Who's Who" of the core of Indiana middle grades supporters. Their activities represent a classic case of being given an inch and taking a mile. The work of this group helped the state succeed in winning a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to promote statewide policy change that benefits adolescents. The two-year grant fueled the activities of a new Adolescent Advisory Board, a coalition of middle grades supporters and representatives from the state's youth-serving agencies. Also through Carnegie funding, this group produced "Betwixt and Between," a handbook on improving middle grades in Indiana. The book is a combination call-to-arms and guidebook on creating an exemplary middle level school.

This circle of middle grades enthusiasts packs a hefty agenda: an overhaul of state licensing and curriculum rules to better suit middle level needs; a revival of teacher preparation programs that focus on the middle grades; special training programs for principals and regional in-service workshops on exemplary middle level practices.

The very fact that the middle level movement plows ahead despite obstacles is what makes Indiana such an interesting case. In the scope of the entire country, few state or local leaders have taken a systematic approach to creating exemplary middle schools. Many places will have to be like Indiana, where the focal point of change is neither the DOE nor the local superintendents' offices. Indiana's movement thrives backstage — slowly, often unnoticed, yet so thoroughly grounded that its shape is being built of stone.

## The Lilly Legacy

**It is commonly accepted here that Indiana would not have as cohesive a middle grades movement were it not for the involvement of the Lilly Endowment Inc.** Its role presents an excellent case study of the scope and influence that can be exercised on school reform by thoughtful, knowledgeable outside support.

With $6 million in grants made specifically to middle grades since the mid-1980s, the Endowment has provided professional assistance and seed money for the projects that many of Indiana's economically troubled schools and corporations (the Indiana term for school districts) could never have afforded, or would have thought to pursue.

Its most large-scale effort has been the Middle Grades Improvement Program (MGIP). Now six years old, this program has provided an organizational and support structure to the restructuring efforts of 65 middle schools in 16 urban school districts.

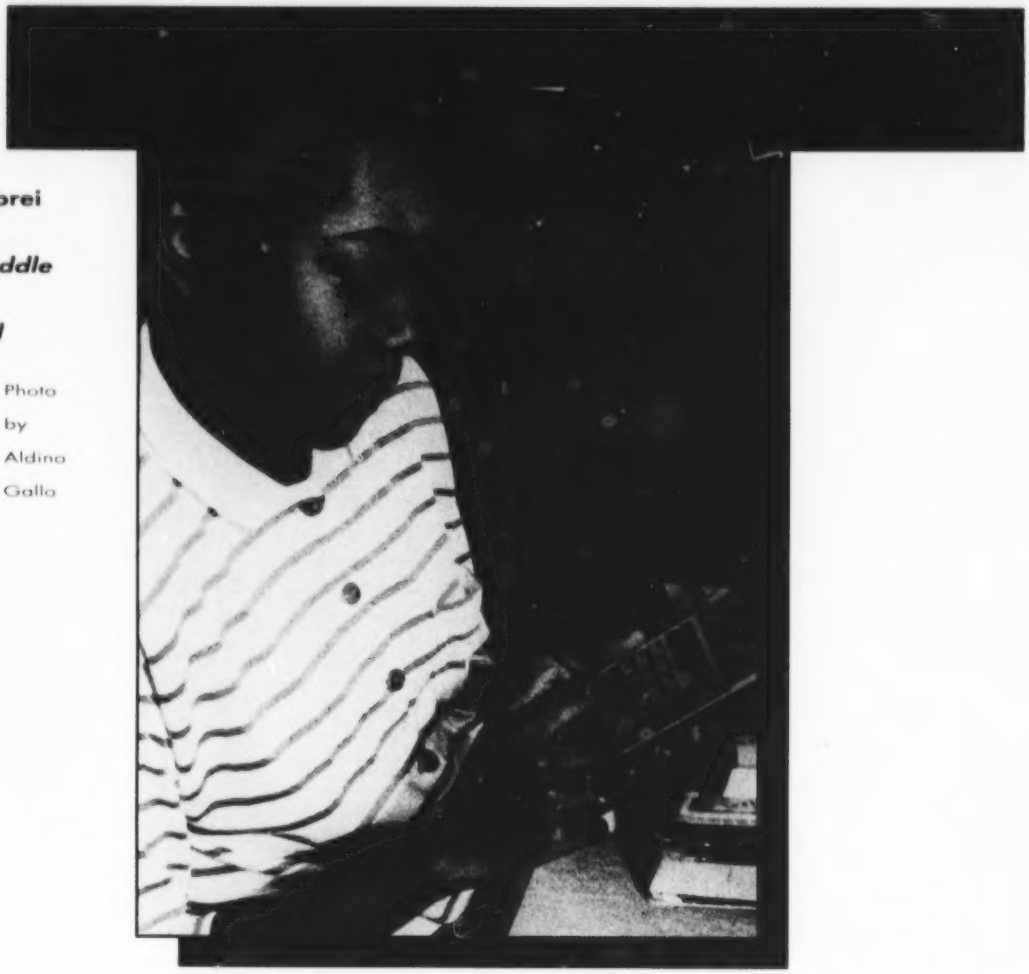
The Endowment's mission was to present the content of the effective middle grades movement to these not always enthusiastic participants and help the school corporations embrace the ideas as their own visions. The goal was to change the very nature of the relationship between teacher and child, but the underlying belief was that this could only happen with support within the school, the school corporation and the community at large.

The support has meant inservice training opportunities on all aspects of exemplary middle grades practices. The project design emphasizes that restructuring plans should be generated by the participants themselves. But Endowment personnel have been firm in directing participants to better serve minority students. Efforts to improve equity are expected to increase when MGIP enters its third funding cycle.

The Endowment has funded several offshoots of MGIP including grants to encourage interdisciplinary instruction. In terms of statewide impact, the most profitable of expanded MGIP efforts is the MGIP Network. Designed to coordinate communication and training opportunities among the 16 MGIP districts, the Network has become a central support system for sustained statewide reform and renewal. The service is particularly helpful for MGIP schools whose central offices remain unresponsive to the importance of the project.

More so, Network members have tied in with the Indiana Middle Level Education Association, doubling the infrastructure of the middle grades movement. These two groups have unified their respective voices toward aligning state policy with local reform efforts.

No one expects the Endowment to remain involved at current levels forever. But whenever the foundation's participation decreases, an infrastructure of informational and training opportunities will remain.



**Student Korei Nutall *Eggers Middle School, Hammond***

Photo by Aldino Gallo

CHAPTER I

# The Basics

***A profile of Indiana students illustrate the need for more child-centered education.***

When Brandon Buckman started at Helfrich Park Middle School, an MGIP school in Evansville a year ago, he apprehensively watched the halls, looking warily for "an eight-foot boy with six feet of chain in both hands."

His classmate, Jessica Corbett, shared his apprehension. "The older kids just look so big, and the teachers look stern to me."

Brian Wright, who entered Fort Wayne's Portage Middle School at the same time, lamented, "Everyone has strict rules! It's like going to an execution."

Tate Lane declares, "I think of myself as very mature. I don't like to vandalize or damage school property."

Scratch an Indiana middle grades student, and you come away with a textbook example of the classic composition of youthful insecurity and passion for autonomy and independence. They are more interested in school than one might guess — more sold on the value of education — yet just as sure that the main business at hand is their social relationships.

Every year these middle-grade students age a bit more: to be allowed to babysit alone grows to the need to be dropped off at the mall or the movies without chaperones which is immediately followed by the urge to date and — this before ninth grade — the privilege of driving the car themselves.

Indiana's young adolescents give voice to the vast body of research that matches the developmental needs of this age to an appropriate educational program.

Statistics about Indiana's almost half-million 10- to 15-year-olds illustrate how the pressures of modern society are creating barriers to success. For starters, about 100,000 of these children are not enrolled in an educational program. The drop-out rate for students shifted dramatically in 1991, from what had been the 10th and 11th grades to 9th grade. Students who withdrew from school most often cited "disinterest in curriculum" as the reason.

A 1991 survey of the prevalence of alcohol and other drug use in Indiana illustrates the presence of these substances in the lives of middle level students. The survey found that 33.1% of 5th graders had at least sampled alcohol. By seventh grade, 56.3%

had tried it. By 10th grade, 91.4% reported sampling alcohol, and 50% used the drug at least once a month.

While experimentation with such drugs as crack and cocaine is infrequent, 26% of 10th graders said they have experimented with marijuana and 20% said they have tried amphetamines.

Even this smattering of evidence shows that Indiana's middle grades children are, at best, at a turning point in their potentially productive lives. At worst, overwhelming forces work against their futures.

## The Ideal Program

What kind of schools do these students attend?

"There is considerable lack of fit between what we know about young adolescents and what we do to them five days a week, in schools." So wrote Joan Lipsitz, in 1977, as one of the early voices in the movement to fashion middle schools to the child. Today she is a program director in the Lilly Endowment's Middle Grades Improvement Program (MGIP).

Lipsitz's point, and that of others involved in the education of early adolescents, is that the pre-high schools, or "junior highs" are no place for apprehensive children like Brandon Buckman.

The sterile atmosphere created by a teacher operating from a lectern is stultifying to the likes of Brian Wright. Boredom and sheer lack of relevance become major reasons for dropping out of school, as evidenced by the state's dropout statistics.

And for the acquaintances of Tate Lane who have not matured enough to stop vandalism and other acts of delinquency, a shape-up-or-get-out-discipline attitude erects a barrier between problem children and their education.

Middle grades should foster diversely styled learning experiences which reinforce a student's sense of personal competency and achievement. Middle grades educators should guide children through this period of vast physical change, both by encouraging physical activity and helping students define new social roles. Schools should be intimate enough that students have at least one adult in whom they can confide. At the same time, through school or community-based activities, these children should be nudged into an awareness of their place in the world.

Yet as the following chapters will show, grassroots activity has generated a widespread middle grades movement.

The paucity of data makes gauging change difficult. Hence, the admittedly non-scientific, voluntary annual survey by the Indiana Secondary School Administrators, is used as a major data source. Although only half the possible respondents answer, and the data includes only schools with grades 5-8 or 6-8, the elements of effective middle grades appear to be showing up in force:

- More than one-half the principals were experimenting with block scheduling and 58% said their teachers used interdisciplinary instruction.
- Cooperative learning styles were being used in 64% of these schools. Advisor-advisee programs were in 43% of the schools.
- More than 80% of these schools rewarded students with special recognition programs for good attendance, academic achievement and general behavior.

CHAPTER II

# Looking for Leaders

***Indiana educational administrators have various reasons for adapting effective middle school techniques. How they approach change illustrates the importance of good leadership.***

**For many** of Indiana's middle grades educators, the new Shelbyville Middle School weight room southeast of Indianapolis is beyond their wildest dreams. Arnold Schwarzenegger would be very comfortable here. Seven-time Olympic gold medal swimmer Mark Spitz would love the school's Olympic-size pool.

Michael Osha and Margaret Lewis, principal and assistant principal respectively, are unapologetic about the embarrassment of riches in this new middle school in central Indiana.

The colorfully appointed new structure is carpeted everywhere, even on top of the lockers to reduce noise. Every room has a television, computers abound, and a sound system plays rock music during lunch hour Fridays if the students have been good. The cafetorium, also carpeted, rivals some Fortune 500 lunchrooms.

Still, Lewis and Osha are quick to point out that the building — although lovely and constructed with the complete support of the community to replace an aging junior high — is just a building.

"We have a fabulous new building. We spent tons of money on it. We have a supportive community," says Lewis. "But the people who make it work are the teachers."

Indiana's rural and suburban schools have been making impressive forays into the middle school improvement movement. Among examples of the range of reasons for undertaking change:

- "It was obvious schools weren't meeting the needs of kids this age," says Mary Groves, a guidance counselor at Yorktown Middle School in Mt. Pleasant Township near Muncie, whose staff has relied on direction from the state's professional organizations to phase-in block scheduling, advisory programs and teaming.

- "We didn't have near the communication when we were a junior high, either among teachers or with parents," says Glenn Gambel, who was principal when Benjamin Franklin School in Valparaiso switched from a junior high to a middle school five years ago.

- Scottsburg Junior High, in southeastern Indiana, had not one component of an effective middle school. And its poor attendance rates, achievement test scores and discipline problems indicated trouble. Desperate for change but lacking finances, the tiny school shopped the country for innovations attuned to school needs but innovative and flashy enough to impress state DOE grantmakers. The school is the only middle grades program to win a highly competitive state restructuring grant.

- The Plainfield Community School Corporation near Indianapolis was outgrowing its K-6, 7-12 configuration. Administrators solved the space problem by constructing a new middle school. The community hired renowned middle school consultant Howard Johnston, who claims that Plainfield instituted every single suggestion he made.

**"If I were going to give advice, I would say they have to make sure there is a commitment by everyone — the central office, the board — to this change and process."**

Principal Glenn Gambel
Benjamin Franklin Middle School, Valparaiso

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Representatives from these schools and the 16 urban school districts in MGIP have had common experiences, despite their lack of familiarity with each other. Key among them is that it is important to have support from the central office.

Support can take the form of individual gestures. Shelbyville's school board southeast of Indianapolis supported the new middle school by approving extra related arts teachers to allow others common planning time.

At its best, however, support is all-encompassing. When F. Steven Stults, principal of Belzer Middle School, an MGIP school in Lawrence Township, needs to hire a replacement for one of his teaching teams, he calls the central office. There, Bill Conner, director of personnel, begins the hiring process by reviewing candidates whom he believes have the "right stuff" for middle schools.

"He knows the student populations and expectations for middle schools. He checks the teachers who are interested in upper elementary to see if they are caring and nurturing, interested in getting to know students personally, in working with the families. Also, are they in tune with the multicultural setting," Stults explains.

At Belzer, Stults does not hire a teacher until the team with the vacancy finds an applicant who will complement their talents.

"It really is a continuum here," Stults says. "Respect, dignity, pride. The student-friendly environment is really a theme from the top down."

In the Valparaiso Schools in northwestern Indiana, Superintendent Michael Benway decided cooperative learning — a teaching approach considered especially well-suited to the middle grades — was an appropriate skill. Benway engaged a technical assistant from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore to train the staff over several years.

Benway told teachers that their participation in the training — and its actual use — were optional. But to create systemwide support for this change, he insisted that office personnel, such as the business manager, attend training sessions along with teachers. Benway himself sat in the front row.

"If I were going to give advice, I would say they have to make sure there is a commitment by everyone — the central office, the board — to this change and this process," says Gambel, principal at Valparaiso's Benjamin Franklin Middle School, who went through the training process with Benway.

Gambel, who likes to quip that "support is only forever from your mother," periodically approaches the school board to emphasize the success of the middle school program. That way, in the face of budget problems, the board understands how cuts in the middle school will affect the overall concept.

## It's Not So Simple

While having a unified vision from the school board down to a school's support staff helps nurture middle grades restructuring, it is not always easy to forge.

"The toughest nut to crack is at the board and administrative level," says Peter Buttenweiser, coordinator of the MGIP technical advisors. "Policies passed — grading systems, the budget, who gets appointed principal, constraints of the teacher union — are not supportive. That has become the great barrier the program has not been able to overcome," he explains.

William Kerewsky, a consultant to middle schools who has traveled Indiana, adds, "The power of the informal organization is very, very strong. The power of the relationships between the unions and the school board, the superintendent and principals, doesn't get spoken of but determines how people relate to each other."

Because MGIP schools have had so much support from sources outside the central administration, they have experienced improvement regardless of the level of central office cooperation. But lack of interest among chief administrators and school board members can be deadly, as Mary Groves saw with early restructuring efforts in Yorktown in Mt. Pleasant Township near Muncie.

"It didn't catch on," she says. "A lot of this was lack of understanding. It didn't have the administrative push behind it. The Mt. Pleasant Township school board didn't understand what was being said."

Besides the lack of support, Groves found no readily available source of information on middle grades change for teachers, no outsider they could turn to as MGIP schools can turn to Lilly Endowment-assigned consultants.

That is why, Groves says, she responded enthusiastically in the mid-1980s when friends on the Ball State University faculty tried to regenerate the Indiana Middle Level Education Association as a resource for middle school personnel.

IMLEA since has become a major resource for would-be middle school reformers around the state.

CHAPTER III

# Baby Giant Steps

***Deciding what change should look like is a big decision, maybe even bigger than change itself.***

**In East Chicago, Ind.,** an economically depressed, ethnically diverse community among the steel mills on Lake Michigan, change was . . . well, not something that came up very often. Sleeping Beauty comes to mind — a system that needed to be awakened.

"I think when we started, the statewide achievement scores were the lowest in the state. Corporal punishment was very common," recalls Norman Newberg, University of Pennsylvania education professor and consultant to East Chicago middle grades for MGIP. "Oddly enough, except for the superintendent, there was a fair amount of contentment with that. I think the rank and file, with the exception of a small group, were not terribly discontented."

The East Chicago Schools have not adopted sweeping change, yet Newberg says the distance the district has traveled is "light years." It may be moving slowly, but it is changing fundamentally.

Middle grades restructuring can be seen as the adaptation of a lot of different strategies: team teaching, advisor/advisee programs, interdisciplinary instruction, community involvement projects. But understanding these strategies and how they fit a given corporation is an important first step.

MGIP, for example, has not necessarily broken new ground in defining an effective middle school. It has helped to translate that vision into reality for a diverse pool of school personnel who did not really even have a handle on the meaning of the word "vision."

It also has been about helping educators differentiate between the flash and glamor of new ideas and the changes that would be good for them and why. It has been about getting everyone singing the same song, especially when some of the players think they are tone-deaf. It is the process that has made the staffs of the schools with the most advanced change realize that they have much further to go.

This approach of focusing on understanding also has been key to restructuring in schools not affiliated with MGIP.

Staff at Shelbyville Middle School southeast of Indianapolis, for example, decided to restructure its program and blocked out a four-year phase in plan. "Year one was developing an awareness of what a middle school was," says Margaret Lewis, assistant principal.

At Plainfield Community Middle School near Indianapolis, under the direction of consultant Howard Johnston, the faculty, staff and parents developed a mission statement and philosophy, "a set of key documents to guide decision-making," says principal Jerry Goldsberry.

Eight committees explored the practical implications of transition: advisor/advisee programs, parent participation, extracurricular activities, student leadership and a revised

approach for gifted and talented programs called "academic challenge." A final committee studied teaming and scheduling. The entire staff reviewed all recommendations to ensure they met overall improvement goals.

While such an approach may seem unduly intense, the mistakes of others have shown the need to build everyone's interest and understanding of the middle grades movement before instituting change.

The alternative to this understanding is what William Bickel has seen. A University of Pittsburgh educator who has evaluated middle grades progress in the state for Lilly, Bickel says many school districts jump into innovations, only to stop dead in their tracks, not understanding what these approaches actually meant.

Particularly in the Middle Grades Improvement Program, many schools opted to use the Middle Grades Assessment Process (MGAP). The MGAP user handbook is itself a guide to the elements of a child-centered middle grades program. Besides familiarizing users with the territory, MGAP provides step-by-step directions on identifying strengths and weaknesses. Plans for change grow from interviews with parents, teachers and students, but not in a way that lays blame.

"It broadened what I would say was the typical narrow vision. Schools too often focus on one dimension, achievement test performance. This encouragement to start with data collection means it's no longer one person's pet peeve, it's the data out there," says Bickel.

Now five years since MGAP was done in many urban settings, teachers and administrators at individual schools still talk about MGAP as powerful, particularly for the way that it gave voice to many with good opinions that had previously been ignored. At Decatur Middle School in Indianapolis, school representatives have done MGAP a second time to gauge how far they have come and how far they need to go.

## See Your Agent

**Middle grades educators may approach restructuring from vastly differing directions.** But they are unanimous about one approach: get out of town.

Even those who had virtually no resources with which to plan change believe that site visitation or attending conferences was a key investment.

"It's sort of hard to imagine steak when all you've seen is hamburger," says Roberta Bowers, MGIP liaison for the Indianapolis Public Schools. Travel was essential as she and IPS teachers tried to draft their plans for change.

As an indication of how important visitations are, the technical advisors who have watched over change in MGIP schools list travel as one of the keys to change. This from out-of-towners who themselves bring in fresh ideas.

"In almost any Indiana community, there is within an hour's ride another school that's doing things differently," says Norman Newberg, consultant to the East Chicago schools. "It's very healthy to get out of your context and see what they're doing, if only to learn you're doing all right."

## Executing Plans

Newberg and Diane Zych, the middle grades liaison for East Chicago Schools, recall the steps that constituted the corporation's first moves. Stirring up discontent — an awareness that things were not right — came first, Newberg says.

Having identified teacher-student relationships as a key concern, teachers decided to explore Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA). They did so cautiously, taking a year to decide if this approach would benefit East Chicago. After a year, all teachers began TESA training. Bolstered by TESA, the teachers then decided to work further on their relationships with students with training in the "Discipline with Dignity" approach. The same cautious and thorough approach was taken in phasing this in, Zych says.

This work on teacher-student relationships led to questions about equal access. East Chicago has since phased out much of its tracked curriculum in response to evidence that tracking sets up minority students for failure.

As for an idea as radical as teaming, a handful of East Chicago teachers won additional Endowment money to pilot teams and interdisciplinary units in each of the two middle schools. Participating teachers are pleased with the results of their experiment. But Zych says other teachers will be assigned to teams only when they are ready.

"You might characterize it as a baby step, but for us it was a giant step," Zych says.

To Judy Johnston, who has been technical advisor in Terre Haute and Fort Wayne, "None of these school corporations can move without an overarching vision of what middle schools look like, what they should be and what they should do for children. It requires a skillful leader to explain it. It has to be something people can buy into and bring to reality in a variety of different ways," Johnston says. Creating such a vision is a fundamental step, she notes.

**Carole Storch is living proof that you do not need a lot of money to create a child-focused middle school.**

Five years ago, the then-assistant principal of the Rush County High School in central Indiana was told she would be running Benjamin Rush Junior High School the following year.

Two of the county's rural elementary buildings were being closed for lack of enrollment. Upper grades children were to be transferred to Benjamin Rush. Emotional turmoil ensued in this tiny rural locale.

"There was the problem of moving these children to the big city," says Storch, who compares this central Indiana town to the fictional Mayberry.

While the school board and administration gave Storch unconditional support to update the junior high, they did not tell her how to do it, and they did not give her any money. What she accomplished is proof that force of will, as much as any factor, can lead to change.

With a background in secondary education, Storch was so unschooled about middle schools, she claims that even architects knew more than she did. "The word 'teaming' was told to me by an architect friend who was putting a new wing

## Starting from Scratch: A Case Study

on a middle school building," Storch recalls. "Kathy showed me blueprints to the building and said 'this would be perfect for teaming.' I didn't want to look stupid and say I didn't know what that was. But I didn't know," she says.

Storch's self-education came from reading everything she could get her hands on. There was no money to hire technical assistance. But the money from the soda pop machine in the faculty lounge financed some travel, as did donations from the proceeds of an all-school chili dinner.

While still assigned to the high school, she and teachers from the middle grades began visiting other schools and attending middle grades conferences.

Teaming seemed a good idea, once Storch understood it. The final explanation came from a colleague at a progressive middle school, who drew the team scheduling concept out on a paper table cloth during a conference they both were attending. "I still have, in my drawer, that piece of table cloth," she says.

She made several decisions about Benjamin Rush during the interim year before taking over. She decreed that teachers would work together in teams beginning the following school year. The school board granted Storch's request for an additional teacher whose presence would allow a team planning period in addition to a personal planning period.

The school had been extremely tracked. "We had low basic, regular basic and high basic. All these kids were together all day, even in P.E.," she says.

In drawing up a master schedule for her first year, Storch started phasing out ability groups. Today, only Chapter I tutoring and algebra remain.

Another change followed when Storch finally arrived and found a secretary whose job description charged her with making out frequent corporal punishment reports. Children were sent to Storch's office continuously "for breaking a pencil or forgetting a book." Storch encouraged the teams to handle discipline issues.

Despite the top-down nature of this change, teachers thrived. Many were aware that children were not being reached.

"The teachers have been like sponges. There's a whole different focus on the value of the school," she says.

The school atmosphere changed remarkably.

"It was like night and day. We went from over 500 discipline referrals to 200 that first year. We went from 95% attendance to 98% attendance," she says.

Explaining their team-teaching system during the spring Indiana Middle Level Education Association convention, Benjamin Rush teachers appeared a rejuvenated lot. One confessed he had been headed into a rut, but teaming had pulled him back. Another lamented that the advisor/advisee program is scheduled only bimonthly because of scheduling conflicts.

This year, Rush received its first performance award, a state-sponsored cash award program for schools whose student achievement profile has made measurable gains.

"We're still walking. We need to get stronger," says Storch, who has further changes planned. "I see more interdisciplinary teaching, more communication between the teachers, more incentives for the kids, and more attempts at helping children's self-esteem."

**All-inclusive teams at Plainfield Community Middle School**

Courtesy Plainfield Community Middle School



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CHAPTER IV

# Setting Climate Control

***Building a supportive school atmosphere is as important as any change in classroom teaching.***

**At Plainfield** Community Middle School outside of Indianapolis, if you want to be a cheerleader, you can be a cheerleader. One of 115 cheerleaders, mind you. But with the help of a voluntary squad of parents who sew, you will be in uniform, lining the end zones and sidelines at football games.

In this school of 400 students, 100 came out for swimming one year, 73 for cross country.

Except for volleyball and basketball, which field such small teams that playing time for a large number would be insignificant, Plainfield coaches do not turn anybody away. Neither do the fine arts teachers.

"We're not trying to eliminate competition," says principal Jerry Goldsberry (the school wins state academic and athletic contests despite the no-cut rule). "We're just trying to deemphasize competition."

When it comes to choosing a starting point for change, think about atmosphere: is it a friendly, comfortable place where children have a sense of belonging? A place that nurtures their sense of success and shuns practices that make anyone feel on the outs?

Schools across Indiana have adopted a myriad of approaches to creating accepting environments. Plainfield's no-cut policy is a dramatic example of giving students a sense of self worth and personal skill.

In a healthy environment, everyone is treated with the respect due to all potentially good and contributing citizens. The staff understands how puberty creates new emotional challenges students must learn to negotiate.

Simply by asking middle level students what makes them uncomfortable, school personnel have uncovered easily-solved problems. In schools where the doors have been removed from bathroom stalls for security, girls are embarrassed by the publicness of using the toilet.

Asked what they most feared about their new middle school experience, sixth graders in two of the state's schools unanimously selected a jammed locker. But negotiating a building physically larger than their grade school and having to change classes from one end to another also were big fears.

## Comfort in the Big City

At H.L. Harshman School 101, an MGIP school in Indianapolis, Principal Marcia Capuano believes the first step to comfort for her inner-city students is just feeling well. A lack of medical attention left Harshman students suffering from frequent infectious problems such as pink eye, influenza and skin rashes. Capuano raised funds to open the first middle-school health clinic in the state.

In schools where controlling students is a difficult issue, many faculties report success from programs that highlight non-authoritarian discipline approaches. East Chicago teachers are happy with the way

Discipline with Dignity training taught them to shift discipline "away from the notion of punishment to a relationship between behavior and consequences," says Diane Zych, MGIP liaison for the two East Chicago middle schools.

At John Young Middle School in Mishawaka near South Bend, encouraging student dignity and a sense of belonging are interwoven with the school's discipline approach. "The Three Rs: Respect, Responsibility, Rewards" involves students, parents and staff in maintaining these principles: respecting school participants and property; exhibiting responsibilities such as class participation, homework and conduct; and reaping rewards for these behaviors. Incentive programs from Student of the Week to Happy Grams reward students for their efforts.

## The Transitional Years

Mishawaka's Young Middle School is one of several schools exploring the importance of a good transition from elementary to middle and high school.

School personnel have established a number of events for the entrance and exit years. Those scheduled for sixth graders help acclimate children to the vastly larger building. Special assemblies give students an opportunity to ask questions about the new emotional landscape. Activities for eighth graders prepare them to consider career options and acclimate them to the differences in the high school — the size, the greater choice of classes, the larger, more mature students.

A transitional program at Plainfield Middle School outside Indianapolis is built into the curriculum instead of the guidance program. Sixth grade parallels fifth in that students are taught more than one class by the same teacher, "a homeroom type of teacher, someone who could keep an eye on you," Goldsberry says.

Core classes in the seventh grade are organized into a five-hour block, which the five-member teacher team uses to its discretion. By eighth grade, students are phased into more of a subject-specific schedule. Teachers still work in teams to share information about students, and the schedule is flexible enough for the occasional interdisciplinary unit.

At Shelbyville Middle School southeast of Indianapolis, Principal Mike Osha says a sixth grade program was designed to be similar to elementary school. But in their case, the isolation was created for the comfort of parents, who were concerned their children were too young to mingle with the more advanced seventh and eighth graders.

## Advisor/Advisee Programs

Many Indiana schools have established advisor/advisee programs to help children grasp the nature of the emotional changes they face. These regularly scheduled periods pair teachers with students to examine real-life issues, be they careers, study skills or the trials and tribulations of adolescent friendship.

Because students are assigned to one teacher for the advisory period, they establish a supportive relationship with that adult that gives them a grounding.

At Guion Creek Middle School, an MGIP school near Indianapolis and one of the first schools to adopt advisor-advisee programs, Principal Beth Copenhaver found teachers benefiting as much as students.

"It gives the teachers a better understanding of what kids go through at this age," Copenhaver says.

When it comes to inspiring a sense of security for the students, many teachers find that improving atmosphere is most successful when coupled with deeper structural changes: assigning children to teams of teachers in a block of classrooms which creates a sense of security.

As the coming chapter will show, teaming has benefits for students and teachers.

## ▪ Breaking Up the Highs

**The phone rings. A secretary answers.**

**"Turkey Run High," she says.**

When junior high students were asked how they felt about attending this grades 7-12 school 45 minutes north of Terre Haute, they had more to say than school administrators expected.

Mostly, they felt like stepchildren. And who wouldn't in a school whose name is considered too long to say over the phone: Turkey Run Junior/Senior High School. Even the sign out front acknowledges only the high school.

Since taking a look at its middle level program a few years ago, the staff at Turkey Run has gotten the "junior high" on the letterhead. More importantly, its faculty has been trained to understand the special needs of middle level-aged students. And several changes have been made to emphasize the junior high as an entity separate from the high school, even though they remain joined physically.

Indiana has 112 schools where middle grades students attend classes with high school students. Efforts by the staff at Turkey Run — and those by the larger LaVille Junior/Senior High near South Bend — show that the middle school movement is not occuring exclusively in middle or junior high buildings.

Working with Indiana State University education professor Robert Williams, under a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., Turkey Run used the Middle Grades Assessment Program to pinpoint areas for change.

"We found out our junior high kids didn't necessarily feel this was a safe environment," Earl says. "They were intimidated about going to the restroom at the same time high school kids were there. They were intimidated in the hallway. They said they had heard stories that the high school kids would stuff them in lockers."

Turkey Run Junior/Senior High has only about 300 students. With 1,500 students, LaVille might seem to have a substantial enough student population to support a separate middle school. But economics made a separate school impossible.

The administration decided two years ago to enhance the middle grades program as much as possible within the 7-12 structure, says John Broome, assistant principal who oversees the younger students. Appointing an administrator for junior high is a popular technique to focus attention on these students' special needs.

At Turkey Run and LaVille, teachers work in content-specific areas with both junior high and high school students. Junior high students dash along with high school students to get to various classes.

Neither school has been able to physically segregate its student body. But each has provided inservice training for faculty to sensitize them to the unique nature of middle level students.

At LaVille, teachers interested in teaching the younger students were trained in cooperative learning techniques. They also are working to organize an advisor/advisee program, Broome says.

LaVille also is phasing in a master schedule so junior high academic teachers can have a common preparation time, even though some still will be teaching high school courses.

Turkey Run has made its greatest progress in giving students an identity, Earl says. There is a junior high student council and junior high national honor society. Athletes attend special junior high sports banquets, and junior high-only dances have been organized. Every day, a junior high student is selected to broadcast announcements for seventh and eighth graders.

Both Broome and Earl say they always will be limited by physical structures, and budget limitations at LaVille slow down what progress can be made. But each has a sense of having made the situation better.

"Our kids now feel like they're their own little group of people, not just part of the high school," Earl says. "They've asserted themselves."

**Helfrich Park Middle School seventh-grade teachers during common planning time.**

Photo by Kevin Swank

CHAPTER V

# Becoming Team Players

***Team teaching is proving to be a fundamental building block to improving middle grades instruction. But that does not mean everybody likes it.***

**Although the focus** of the middle school movement is on the student, educators are finding that change improves their lives as well.

Max Blank, a teacher from Fort Wayne's Geyer Middle School, had felt "the school was dragging. We needed something. No innovative things were going on." The school launched a full-fledged investigation of potential changes.

One innovation it adopted was teaming, or the continuous pairing of students with the same set of core teachers. Blank is enthusiastic about the change and claims the innovations turned Geyer into "a stimulating place."

At Helfrich Park Middle School in Evansville, teacher Rayna Brown calls teaming "a support net, a morale-booster."

Helfrich Principal Mida Creekmur explains how her staff adopted teaming to help themselves. "Teachers had a need to not be isolated, the need to talk to adults instead of kids all day," says Creekmur.

And as many schools are finding, teaming has opened the Helfrich faculty to other beneficial changes, like interdisciplinary teaching units.

"Because we had the organizational pattern in place, we started seeing what we could do to help children see the connections between English, math, social studies and the arts," she says.

The issue of who benefits in a middle school overhaul is an important one because it is teachers who have to change the most.

"It's a massive, very large, professional development effort," says Judy Johnston, a professional development specialist and MGIP consultant to both Terre Haute and Fort Wayne schools. "Teachers grow up in isolation. Teaming breaks that down. It's almost like asking them to teach naked."

Resistance to these ideas — particularly to teaming — remains strong, unbeatable in some cases. Although all in MGIP together, Evansville's other middle schools have not embraced teaming to anywhere near the extent of the Helfrich Park staff. Similarly, in East Chicago, teaming will be introduced only when all teachers feel comfortable. This despite the positive experience that one group of East Chicago teachers are having with a pilot team.

"Discipline in the halls is much more controlled, there is much less conflict because

of the proximity of classes," says Delores Porter, who is on a team at West Side Middle School with Estelle Peterson. "All the kids know who I am. I know who's out of place. They know we work together. Kids are noticing the continuity," comments Peterson, who has overheard students expressing concern that the teachers are comparing notes about them.

**"Teachers grow up in isolation. Teaming breaks that down. It's almost like asking them to teach naked."**

Judy Johnston, professional development specialist

## The Slow Approach

Sheri Goldsberry, assistant principal of Franklin Township Middle School, an MGIP school in the Indianapolis area, says the request for a volunteer pilot team went out as: "We're looking for some people who want to take a risk."

Response was not overwhelming, but the school scraped together enough to start a sixth grade team, whose members had spring and summer training sessions. "We learned from the first group before starting the second group," Goldsberry says.

The following year's experiment with a seventh grade team, comprised of secondary-trained teachers showed that those who have been content-trained, as opposed to the child orientation of elementary school, need guidance on how to team. "After the second pilot team, others saw it was not a sixth grade touchy-feely experience. Other people got itchy to do this," Goldsberry says.

When finally ready to introduce teaming schoolwide, the Franklin staff adapted a formal team identification approach. Teachers took a confidential survey in which they were allowed to state their preferred partners. The administration reviewed the preferences along with ideas of how to mix diverse teaching styles and personality types for team balance.

It has taken almost two full years of teaming to get every Franklin Township teacher to participate actively on teams, Goldsberry adds. For a lot of that time, some teachers appeared prepared to ignore teaming forever.

## When Some Won't Play

If there is a profile of the so-called graying teaching force, Barbara Wagner fits it. Despite her middle years, Wagner, a Benjamin Davis Junior High School teacher in Wayne Township near Indianapolis, has found teaming a marvelous new direction for her career.

Yet she shows obvious anxiety when she describes the division between Davis teachers who have embraced teaming and those who "just can't live without that podium."

Her very demeanor suggests sadness over an issue that has pitted teacher against teacher. "You can't believe the range of emotions you go through" trying to live through this division, she says.

Teachers resisting teaming have been told, at one corporation, that they have three years to adopt it before they are involuntarily transferred out of the school. Some union contracts do not allow such moves, and many schools must leave their unwilling teachers assigned to teams. That may not be so bad, according to Mike Osha of Shelbyville Middle School southeast of Indianapolis. At his school, some teachers closed their classroom doors and waited for teaming to go away. "Pretty soon they'd show up to faculty meetings. Pretty soon they'd have something to say. I think the need to belong is still pretty strong," he says.

## And after teaming . . .

William Kerewsky, formerly a consultant to the South Bend Community Schools, found Navarre School (an MGIP school) Principal Bob Orlowski pouring over the coming year's schedule. Orlowski was trying to figure out how, within the school corporation's continuing budget problems, he could work out a schedule that would allow students and teachers to stay together for several periods.

Having worked in teams for several years and having written a number of interdisciplinary units, the Navarre staff is hungry for block scheduling.

"Even though we have teams, the teachers teach six classes. Their biggest instructional concern is how to get kids to have a block of time, to let them work together," Orlowski says.

Those who have adapted to teaming have become comfortable with changes in teaching styles. Thematic units rich with cooperative learning and active learning are becoming increasingly popular.

The concepts of teaming, team teaching and interdisciplinary instruction all address a problem researchers have identified with the subject-specific classes of the traditional junior high.

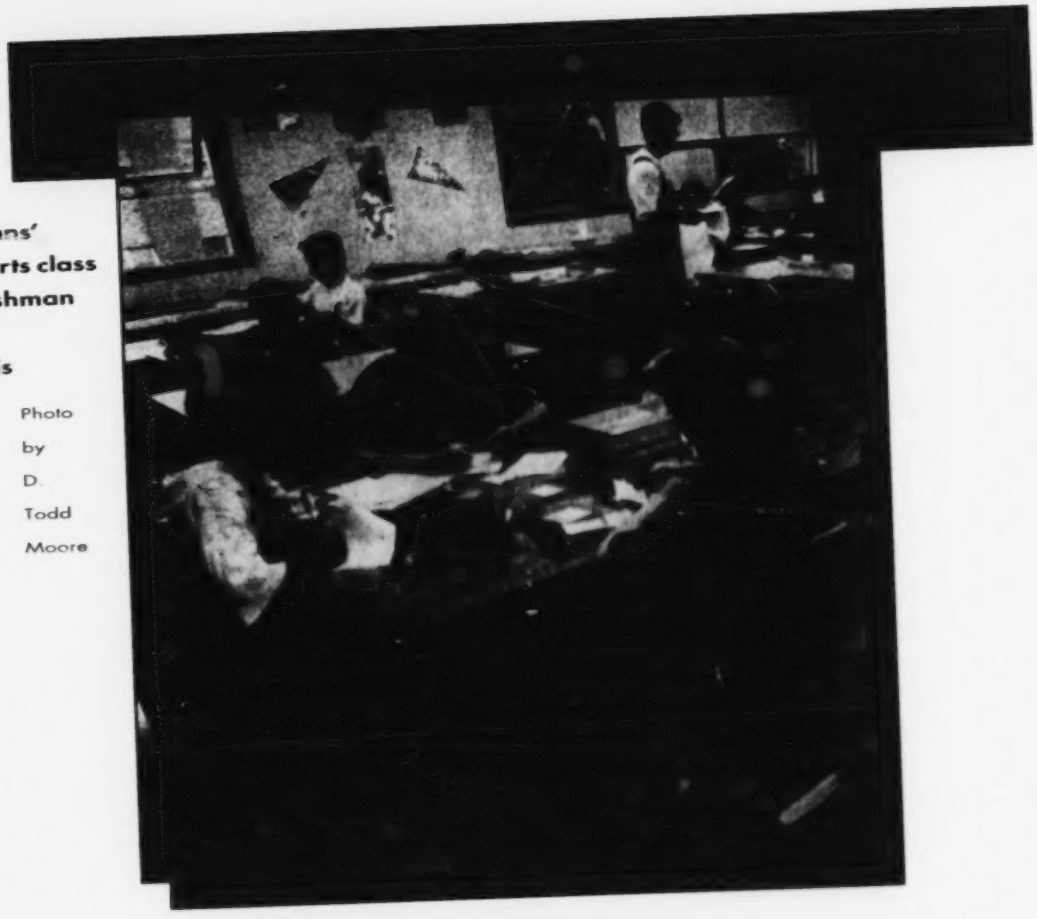
"Too often, instruction is fragmented. It's the 45-minute condensation within that period of time. Kids are not making sense of what they're learning," says Judy Zorfass of the Education Development Center in Newton, Mass. She worked with Indiana urban middle school teachers to create interdisciplinary learning experiences.

Zorfass is finding that this step beyond teaming is beneficial to teachers. "They are concerned that the current approaches and methods and materials aren't working. They're worried that kids will get turned off and never get hooked back into education. The underlying philosophy of interdisciplinary instruction is that it sparks an interest. That gets teachers excited," Zorfass says.

Teaming and these sundry spinoffs also are emerging as the foundation on which school administrators can build heterogeneous groups, thereby eliminating the ability tracks shown by research to understimulate and underserve poor and minority children.

New teaching skills, such as cooperative learning and active learning, help teachers reach out to this broadened group of learners. Like the early pilots of teaming days, heterogeneous grouping in many places is being conducted as a pilot project. Staffs frequently report difficulty overcoming the concerns of the parents of gifted children who fear their children's progress will be slowed by exposure to underachievers.

And like teaming, adapting this new approach most burdens the teacher, who must plan various lesson strategies to meet varying needs, usually without additional planning time to do so.



**Claudia Evans' language arts class at H.L. Harshman School in Indianapolis**

Photo by D. Todd Moore



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CHAPTER VI

# Getting Off Track

***Beyond teaming and interdisciplinary instruction, schools are finding other ways to help children — particularly underserved students — understand their potential and plan their futures.***

**Sharon Walker,** a math teacher at Dickinson Middle School, an MGIP school in South Bend, grew weary of seeing only white faces in her advanced-placement math classes.

So Walker volunteered to tackle the issue of equal access to education by teaching a program to improve students' future options — college being the chief goal.

Research has long confirmed that accelerated programs are comprised of majority students; that poor minority students are underchallenged. The practice is called tracking. Ken Jasinski, former Dickinson assistant principal, and now a South Bend elementary school principal, sees it as "the most blatant example of instructional apartheid ever."

What the staff and faculty of Dickinson realized is that families who have not had access to higher education want their children to have a better life, but they may not know how to help that dream come true. And their children, already designated as low-achievers, may have to be re-taught to dream.

Walker teaches "Alpha math," an algebra course for students who do not meet the school corporation's stringent requirements for honors math. The only entrance requirement of this program is that parents and students commit to succeeding. The first class of 25 included 21 minority students.

Walker fashioned the content of her class to varied learning styles. As a result, Alpha math students' grades have risen higher than the grades of students in honors math. When the Dickinson staff introduced the literature-based Alpha English, the trend toward higher grades continued.

The Alpha Math and Alpha English programs were devised through Dickinson participation as one of nine national sites in a project of the College Entrance Examination Board (the College Board). After publishing "Keeping the Options Open," which addresses inequity and unequal access to higher education, College Board researchers began piloting school-based solutions. The Lilly Endowment is a co-sponsor of this project.

The College Board emphasizes the teacher's role in inspiring far-reaching student aspirations, says Patricia Hendel, director of special services. The emphasis makes sense because teachers are with students for longer periods than any other school personnel.

Moreover, personnel data show teachers remain in one building for many years. Principals and counselors tend to come and go, Hendel says.

The philosophy, as well as guidance experiments sponsored by the Endowment, emphasize teamwork among teachers, administrators and traditional guidance counselors. Toward that end, Dickinson counselor Frank Grubb and Jasinski keep close tabs on the students and make frequent contacts with Alpha parents.

"We're trying to make parents more active participants as we convince the children that they're capable of going to college," Jasinski says. "They have to establish an atmosphere at home." But, he adds "a lot of these parents have never been in college. They perceive it as something for rich people, people with financial resources and an extremely high grade point average."

Wth its combined MGIP and College Board support, Dickinson is something of a forerunner in focusing the entire school's staff on the future of its students.

But Indiana educators are recognizing many smaller approaches that can serve as doorways to the middle grade student's world and future. A small-scale example is community service that fosters a sense of citizenship and self-esteem through forays into the adult world.

At Craig Middle School in Lawrence Township of Indianapolis, teacher Charlotte Kingen deliberately includes underachievers in the Project Leadership Service Club (PLS), funded by the Lilly Endowment, which regularly branches into its neighborhood east of Indianapolis for service projects. At Christmas, for example, the students escorted residents of a local nursing home as they did some holiday shopping.

"Basically, they're at-risk kids," says Kingen. "It helps them see that just because you may have academic deficiencies, you have something to give. You have time. You can push a wheelchair. You're not as bad off as you perceive yourself to be."

This longtime community service program — operated for Indianapolis elementary and high school students no longer — is an example of how service gives young people a combined sense of self-accomplishment, civic duty and more mature approach to their own responsibilities.

"PLS helped me with my school work," explains Khristy Raymer of the Craig Middle School club. "I learned how to follow directions better. I became more involved in things."

"I feel like we're making the world a better place," says Ronnie Mullis, Khristy's classmate. "It gives me something to shoot for. My grades are getting better."

Unique among middle school community service programs, the service club pairs upper elementary students, including middle schoolers, with high school mentors whose friendships give the younger children a sense of stability. In the process, the older students gain a new perspective on leadership, says Carol Meyers, program director. Meyers is working to expand the program in other Indiana communities.

While the service club awakens a sense of community and citizenship, Partners in Education in Terre Haute's Sarah Scott Junior High School combines self-esteem-building activities with an emphasis on careers in this MGIP school. The Vigo County-Purdue Cooperative Extension Services co-sponsors the program with the Terre Haute-based Vigo County School Corporation, an example of a community agency expanding school resources. Teachers suggest how to integrate career activities into their curriculum, and extension office staff plan the activities.

Partners in Education provides a series of field trips that begin as self-exploration but gradually turn to career options. Visits to

some of Terre Haute's major businesses help formulate students' career interests.

Partners in Education also has been actively engaged in scheduling outside speakers in Sarah Scott classrooms to supplement instruction, emphasize careers and serve as role models. Ninth-grader Jerome Owens says when he heard banker Ron Wey speak about personal finance, his goals fell more firmly into place.

"I got a better perspective on real life," he said. "I had to work last year at a day-care center and a grocery store. This program shows me how to be more realistic."

**"I got a better perspective on real life. I had to work last year at a day-care center and a grocery store. This program shows me how to be more realistic."**

**Ninth-grader Jerome Owens, Sarah Scott Junior High School, Terre Haute**

## Developing Priorities

In the original structure of MGIP, schools were to attempt to reach into the community. The complexity of deepening academic instruction proved so consuming, the Lilly Endowment encouraged schools to do one or the other.

It is in this area of equal access and broadened aspirations that participation from parents and community can add so much.

A university-based Saturday enrichment program for Fort Wayne's talented minority students acknowledges the pressures peers can have on turning a student from academic achievement. The FAST (Future Academic Scholars' Track) program creates a supportive network for sixth graders through high school seniors who want to improve their chances for college.

A parent component, with workshops on tangible skills for supporting high academic achievement, is a strong component of FAST.

Understanding that parents need guidance to help their children succeed also is key in a new Lilly Endowment program for the families of Indiana's 21st Century Scholars. The program promises scholarships to minority eighth graders who continue high academic achievement through high school. The new Endowment support program will help parents understand the emotional and academic assistance their children will need throughout high school.

Both FAST and 21st Century Scholars are headquartered away from school. As such, they represent examples of the role community organizations can play in advancing student achievement.

CHAPTER VII

# There's No Silver Bullet . . .

***Effective middle grades strategies have made a world of difference in some of Indiana's toughest inner-city schools. But as-yet defined strategies are needed to help the most troubled.***

**The halls** of H.L. Harshman School 101 in Indianapolis are quiet — so quiet the ghost of days past could whisper memories: like the time Nancy Reagan came to this tough inner-city school to tell the kids "Just Say No."

Back then, students might at least have appreciated her soft-spoken delivery. Many were the days the administration barked at them with a bullhorn or called spot locker searches for illegal stash.

"We used to have a lot of weapons here," says Tanya Douglas, who lives in the Harshman area and has served as security officer for 10 years. Douglas can remember a time when everyone — sometimes even she — expected the worst from Harshman students. And they got it.

Today, school colors of green and white set a restful but businesslike tone. The school's athletic trophies are prominently displayed in the front hall. "READ" is spelled in giant letters over the drinking fountain. A bulletin board displays the motto "Harshman and the Community Working Hand in Hand."

Douglas says weapons are not seen around Harshman anymore, despite the fact that more than 100 of the school's 780 seventh and eighth graders are in the juvenile justice system.

Assistant Principal Michael Cleary estimates that it has been almost three years since a Harshman student was arrested for having drugs in the building. Instead of police, Harshman students today see representatives of the business community dash in for an hour to read with students, serving both as tutors and role models. Representatives of various community development agencies have created a strong community support group. Together with student leaders, these adult boosters found grant money to landscape the front of the school last year.

In addition, Principal Marcia Capuano identified the school's need for an in-house health clinic and garnered community resources to start the only middle school health clinic in the state.

Money from Johnson & Johnson and staff support from the Indiana Department of Health, a local hospital and a neighborhood clinic have put a nurse practitioner and nursing assistant in the building. They treat a constant stream of intestinal and skin problems, pink eye, burns, and general malnutrition.

Harshman started improving when its

faculty started coping with social change, when they acknowledged that good behavior is no longer a given. Faculty and staff have worked to understand the burden urban life places on these students. They have pinpointed the ways they can help and learned to accept what is beyond their control.

Things also started changing when the staff set clear rules, limits and expectations. For example, if you bring in drugs or weapons, if you fight and cause injury, you are arrested. Tough rules are tempered by the welcoming decor, incentive programs and extracurricular activities that give students a sense of belonging.

"We all need to be counselors," says teacher Steve Papesh, a self-described enthusiast of Harshman's new atmosphere. "If we tackle the social and psychological problems, the learning will fall in place." Papesh measures the change these students have experienced by their improved attitudes, attendance and work habits.

Seventh graders Mandy Renfro and Semorris Moore, colleagues, are examples of how students are thriving at Harshman. Both are honor roll students and hold the school's esteemed "Supercitizen" designation.

In this first year of her middle school experience, Mandy has learned that "you've got to work harder than you ever did. I feel like if I get good grades, I could get a scholarship."

Yet both are disappointed by many classmates who come to school as required, but not to learn. "They never want to learn. Some just don't do their work," Mandy says.

"Kids around here think they're grown. They can do what they want," Semorris adds.

For all the special guidance and counseling programs Harshman has instituted, for all the contacts the school has made to work with other agencies, Capuano has not quite figured out how to deal with hard core delinquents and students with profound emotional problems.

Besides students on probation, Harshman is a holding tank for youth sentenced to Indiana Boys School who cannot be admitted for lack of space. There also are students waiting for beds in psychiatric facilities.

"There's no easy answer to those kids' problems. And their needs are so different," says Capuano. Yet their presence is disruptive for the other students.

One program Capuano would like to organize is a mini-school, two hours every day after school for the students whose needs are "extremely in-depth." For them, Capuano says, a seven-hour school day is just too long.

That program would require the approval of juvenile justice authorities, with whom Capuano has a working relationship, but who point out that most youth crime is committed during regular school hours.

Even when the issue is not delinquency, Indiana's most troubled inner city schools are facing a crisis in academic achievement.

The peak dropout year recently has shifted from 10th to ninth grade. The trend is most obvious in such urban locations as Indianapolis' Marion and Lake Counties, says Judith Erickson, director of research services at the Indiana Youth Institute.

While no immediate explanations about this new trend are available, one Indianapolis high school counselor found that some ninth grade dropouts have been retained twice since starting school and now are 16 years old, Erickson says.

Also noteworthy, some schools that tutor students with basic skills shortcomings have not experienced the ninth grade dropout phenomenon, she says.

While the trend has been to encourage heterogeneous groups in middle grades, Erickson believes more schools should take note of these successes and that at least when low-achieving students enter middle schools they should be given special help with basic skills to ensure they are not lost in the curriculum throughout their middle grades careers.

**Guion Creek eighth graders Tim Lockett and Brian Messer in an advisory group session.**

Photo by Susie Fleck



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CHAPTER VIII

# No Turning Back

***Supported by a handful of new organizations, the impact of grassroots change is broadening.***

IMLEA President Steve Riggs is so impressed by progress to date that he has been known to comment, "Pretty soon there's going to be nothing left for us to do."

Riggs is a principal in the Fort Wayne schools where the MGIP process has taken hold so firmly that the will for deep-seated reflection and change is trickling down to the elementary schools and up to the high schools.

If the movement is to grow by conceptual drift, so be it. Robert Williams, an Indiana State University education professor who consults on introducing middle grades concepts in non-traditional settings, expects the "trickle up" effect to change the face of higher education for middle-level teachers.

In 1993, all middle level schools in Vigo County/Terre Haute will go from including grades 7-9 to grades 6-8. "In anticipation of that, Vigo has been looking at the middle school model," Williams explains.

Because ISU trains many of the Vigo school system's teachers, "that gives me strength with my own colleagues. I can say it is time our preparation program legitimately treats topics such as interdisciplinary teaming and collaborative planning," he says.

ISU's preparation program might seem antiquated to students who observe the fresh approaches being taken in Terre Haute's MGIP schools. The threat of appearing outdated is motivating ISU faculty to learn about the middle school philosophy.

As ISU and other universities begin to form staff development plans, they will be able to turn to the Indiana Higher Education Network for Middle Level Educators. Based with Betty Johnson in the Department of Education's Center for School Improvement and Performance and supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the network is pulling together faculty throughout the state's teacher preparation programs who either are diehard middle level educators or who want to know more about this field.

Network meetings expose university representatives to speakers from across the country on such topics as standards for middle-level education preparation programs or higher education networks in other states, says Deborah Butler, an education professor at Wabash College and chair of the group.

The network plans to serve as a source for up-to-date information on higher education teaching programs, perhaps eventually coordinating actual training events, she says. In the meantime, network members recognize they must stimulate interest in change on their own campuses.

Thus, small scale efforts aim for impact in broad arenas. The new Adolescent Advisory Board (AAB) also sponsored by the Carnegie

grant, sets an ideal and a political agenda in its handbook, "Betwixt and Between."

The ideal is the A+ school, exemplified by a list of 24 elements of a well-structured middle grades program. ("Betwixt and Between" contributors, like past IMLEA president Jeff Swensson, say there are no A+ middle schools in Indiana — yet.) Distributed throughout Indiana, the volume can serve well as a unifying resource.

The volume also includes the AAB's call for changes at the state level. And with its general distribution, it can be considered something of a middle grades political primer. The publication sets these expectations for the state:

- For DOE, new curriculum rules would encourage block scheduling. The State Board of Education cleared the way for this during summer 1992 with a vote to allow flexibility to local school districts in establishing minimum instructional times. But the change does not take effect until July 1, 1994. Previously, the state board had mandated a prescribed minutes-per-week forumula for every subject. Also AAB recommends textbook adoption rules which encourage purchase of varying, appropriate materials, not just subject-specific textbooks; an accreditation process that ranks middle schools on the criteria described in the A+ school model; and new standards for middle-level teacher preparation programs.
- For the state's youth-serving agencies, collaboration of services is needed to address the physical and emotional health of adolescent children and their families. With representatives of Indiana's youth-serving agencies on the AAB, these steps already have begun. At the least, AAB representatives are spreading word of the importance of collaboration among schools and youth services.

Carnegie's commitment is for only two years. But as the MGIP Network and IMLEA become more tightly knit, many believe that duo will absorb the AAB and that it will constitute a statewide middle grades watchdog group that pushes state agencies to respond.

IMLEA, meanwhile, is securing funding to run statewide regional training programs on middle level issues. Those who want to take on change will have an inexpensive source for professional development.

The MGIP Network, besides turning its training direction toward multicultural education, has been developing a middle level principals' training program that has reached beyond MGIP schools.

It is possible, five years down the road, that teaching colleges will be only slightly more savvy at preparing middle level teachers; that energy toward change never coalesces in the DOE; that some MGIP schools will look only slightly different from when the project started; that there will be no perfect, or A+, middle school.

What is difficult to imagine is that any school, school district or university which has decided to change its middle grades education programs cannot find a ready and inexpensive model or approaches to institute with the maximum amount of support and the minimum amount of resistance.

That is easy to predict because, for the most part, the leadership and the models already are here.

# Appendix

## GLOSSARY

**Adviser/Advisee —** Refers to regularly scheduled class period set aside for guidance-related activities ranging from discussions on interpersonal relationships to instructions on study skills.

**Adolescent Advisory Board (AAB) —** Comprised of Indiana representatives of youth service agencies and middle grades educators involved in restructuring their own schools, the group is designed to establish and generate interest in statewide standards for helping middle level children.

**Betwixt and Between —** Produced by the AAB, the volume is a guidebook for restructuring individual schools and a call for change among the state's educational and youth-serving agencies.

**Block Scheduling —** Sometimes called "Flexible Scheduling." The combination of consecutive class periods to create a larger block of time in which a subject or cross-section of subjects can be taught.

**Indiana Middle Level Education Association (IMLEA) —** A state affiliate of the National Middle School Association and clearinghouse for ideas and information about restructuring work throughout Indiana.

**Interdisciplinary Instruction —** Instruction units whose content includes information from more than one academic subject, often pulled together by a central theme.

**Middle Grades —** Considered the grades that serve children 10 to 14 years of age, generally 5th through 9th, whether they are in middle school buildings or not.

**Middle Grades Assessment Process (MGAP) —** A prepackaged system for defining strengths and weaknesses of a school in the context of exemplary middle grades practices. Available from the Center for Early Adolescence.

**Middle Grades Improvement Program (MGIP) —** Sponsored by Lilly Endowment Inc., the program is assisting middle grades restructuring in 65 schools in 16 urban public school districts.

**Teaming —** The assignment of a group of teachers into a team that works with a common group of students.

## RESOURCES

**Adolescent Advisory Board**
c/o Steve Riggs, co-chair
Elmhurst High School
3829 Sandpoint Road
Fort Wayne, IN 46809
219-425-7510

**Center for Early Adolescence**
University of North Carolina–
Chapel Hill
D-2 Carr Mill Town Center
Carrboro, NC 27510
919-966-1148

**Education Development Center**
55 Chapel St.
Newton, MA 02160
800-225-3088

**Indiana Department of Education**
c/o Betty Johnson
Room 229, State House
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2798
1-317-232-9141
** Contact for "Betwixt and Between"

**Indiana Higher Education Network for Middle Level Educators**
c/o Deborah Butler
Wabash College
Teacher Education Program
PO Box 352
Crawfordsville, IN 47933-0352
1-317-364-4338

**Indiana Middle Level Education Association**
c/o Roger Boop
College of Education
Butler University
4600 Sunset Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46208
1-317-283-9313/
1-800-343-6852

**Indiana Youth Institute**
333 N. Alabama St.
Suite 200
Indianapolis, In. 46204
1-317-634-4222/
1-800-343-7060

**Middle Grades Improvement Program**
Lilly Endowment Inc.
c/o Joan Lipsitz, Susie DeHart
PO Box 88068
Indianapolis, IN 46208
1-317-924-5471

**Middle Grades Improvement Program NETWORK**
c/o Barbara Jackson
8301 E. 46th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46226
1-317-543-3318

## MIDDLE GRADES IMPROVEMENT NETWORK

### ■ Anderson Community Schools

**Northside Middle School**
1815 Indiana Ave.
Anderson, IN 46012
(317) 641-2055

**Southside Middle School**
101 West 29th St.
Anderson, IN 46014
(317) 641-2051

**East Side Middle School**
2300 Lindberg Road
Anderson, IN 46012
(317) 641-2047

### ■ School City of East Chicago

**Joseph L. Block Junior High School**
2700 Cardinal Drive
East Chicago, IN 46312
(219) 391-4084

**West Side Junior High School**
4001 Indianapolis Boulevard
East Chicago, IN 46312
(219) 391-4068

### ■ Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation

**Christa McAuliffe Middle School**
713 N. Governor St.
Evansville, IN 47711
(812) 421-8508

**Evans Middle School**
837 Tulip Avenue
Evansville, IN 47711
(812) 424-7949

**Glenwood Middle School**
901 Sweetser Avenue
Evansville, IN 47713
(812) 424-2954

**Harwood Middle School**
3013 First Avenue
Evansville, IN 47710
(812) 423-5409

**Helfrich Park Middle School**
2603 W. Maryland Street
Evansville, IN 47712
(812) 425-4543

**McGary Middle School**
1535 S. Joyce Avenue
Evansville, IN 47715
(812) 476-3035

**Oak Hill Middle School**
7700 Oak Hill Road
Evansville, IN 47711
(812) 867-6426

**Perry Heights Middle School**
5800 Hogue Road
Evansville, IN 47712
(812) 423-4405

**Plaza Park Middle School**
7301 Outer Lincoln Avenue
Evansville, IN 47715
(812) 476-4971

**Thompkins Middle School**
1300 West Mill Road
Evansville, IN 47710

**Washington Middle School**
1801 Washington Avenue
Evansville, IN 47714
(812) 477-8983

## MIDDLE GRADES IMPROVEMENT NETWORK

### ■ Fort Wayne Community Schools

**Blackhawk Middle School**
7200 East State Boulevard
Fort Wayne, IN 46815

**Ben F. Geyer Middle School**
420 S. Paulding Rd.
Fort Wayne, IN 46816
(219) 425-7343

**Jefferson Middle School**
5303 Wheelock Road
Fort Wayne, IN 46835

**Kekionka Middle School**
2020 Engle Road
Fort Wayne, IN 46802
(219) 425-7378

**Lakeside Middle School**
2100 Lake Ave.
Fort Wayne, IN 46805

**Lane Middle School**
4901 Vance
Fort Wayne, IN 46815

**Memorial Park Middle School**
2200 Maumee Avenue
Fort Wayne, IN 46803

**Miami Middle School**
8100 Amhurst Drive
Fort Wayne, IN 46819

**Northwood Middle School**
1201 East Wash Center Road
Fort Wayne, IN 46825

**Portage Middle School**
3525 Taylor
Fort Wayne, IN 46802

### ■ School City of Hammond

**A.L. Spohn Middle School**
4925 Sohl Avenue
Hammond, IN 46327

**Donald E. Gavit Middle School**
1670 175th Street
Hammond, IN 46324

**Henry Eggers Middle School**
5825 Blaine Avenue
Hammond, IN 46320

**Scott Middle School**
3635 173rd Street
Hammond, IN 46323
(219) 989-7340

**George Rogers Clark Middle School**
1921 Davis Ave.
Whiting, IN 46394

### ■ Indianapolis Public Schools

**Crispus Attucks Junior High School**
1130 North West Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202

**John Marshall Junior High School**
10101 East 38th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46236

**Henry W. Longfellow School**
510 Laurel Street
Indianapolis, IN 46203

**Shortridge Junior High School**
3401 N. Meridian
Indianapolis, IN 46208

**Forest Manor Junior High School**
4501 E. 32nd Street
Indianapolis, IN 46218
(317) 226-4363

## MIDDLE GRADES IMPROVEMENT NETWORK

**Merle Sidener School**
2424 East Kessler Boulevard
Indianapolis, IN 46220

**Emma Donnan School**
1202 East Troy Avenue
Indianapolis, IN 46203

**Willard J. Gambold School**
3725 Kiel Avenue
Indianapolis, IN 46224

**H.L. Harshman School**
1501 East 10th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46201

**Thomas A. Edison Junior High School**
777 S. White River Parkway, West Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46221

### ■ M.S.D. of Decatur Township

**Decatur Township Middle School**
5108 South High School Road
Indianapolis, IN 46241

### ■ Franklin Township Community School Corporation

**Franklin Township Middle School**
6019 S. Franklin Road
Indianapolis, IN 46259
(317) 862-2446

### ■ M.S.D. of Lawrence Township

**Belzer Middle School**
7555 East 56th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46226

**Craig Middle School**
6501 Sunnyside Road
Indianapolis, IN 46236

### ■ M.S.D. of Perry Township

**Keystone Middle School**
5715 S. Keystone Avenue
Indianapolis, IN 46227
(317) 787-9451

**Meridian Middle School**
8040 S. Meridian Street
Indianapolis, IN 46217
(317) 881-8283

### ■ M.S.D. of Pike Township

**Lincoln Middle School**
5555 W. 71st Street
Indianapolis, IN 46268
(317) 291-9499

**Guion Creek Middle School**
4401 W. 52nd Street
Indianapolis, IN 46268
(317) 293-4549

### ■ M.S.D. of Warren Township

**Creston Junior High School**
10925 E. Prospect Street
Indianapolis, IN 46239
(317) 894-8883

## MIDDLE GRADES IMPROVEMENT NETWORK

**Stonybrook Junior High School**
11300 E. Stonybrook Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46229
(317) 894-2744

### ■ M.S.D. of Wayne Township

**Ben Davis Junior High School**
1155 South High School Road
Indianapolis, IN 46241

### ■ South Wayne Junior High School

4901 W. Gadsden
Indianapolis, IN 46241
(317) 247-6265

**Fulton Junior High School**
7320 W. 10th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46224

### ■ Muncie Community Schools

**Northside Middle School**
2400 Bethel Avenue
Muncie, IN 47304
(317) 747-5295

**Wilson Middle School**
2000 S. Franklin Street
Muncie, IN 47302

### ■ South Bend Community Schools

**Andrew Jackson Middle School**
5001 South Miami Road
South Bend, IN 46614

**Clay Middle School**
52900 Lily Road
South Bend, IN 46637

**Jesse Dickinson Middle School**
4494 Elwood
South Bend, IN 46628

**Navarre Middle School**
4702 West Ford Street
South Bend, IN 46619

**Thomas E. Edison Middle School**
2701 Eisenhower Drive
South Bend, IN 46615

### ■ Vigo County School Corporation

**Chauncey Rose Junior High School**
1275 Third Avenue
Terre Haute, IN 47807

**Honey Creek Junior High School**
9215 Honey Creek Road
Terre Haute, IN 47802

**Otter Creek Junior High School**
3055 Lafayette Avenue
Terre Haute, IN 47805

**Sarah Scott Junior High School**
2000 S. 9th Street
Terre Haute, IN 47802
(812) 238-4381

**Woodrow Wilson Junior High School**
301 South 25th Street
Terre Haute, IN 47803

**West Vigo Middle School**
RR 15 Box 326
West Terre Haute, IN 47885

## The Education Writers Association

is the professional association for reporters and other writers who cover education. The EWA publishes several newsletters, including the ***Education Reporter***, and the urban middle grades bi-monthly ***High Strides***. The association also runs an annual conference, the National Seminar, and periodic regional conferences. In addition to the National Awards for Education Reporting, the only independent awards competition for education journalism, EWA sponsors several fellowship programs and publishes periodic reports on a variety of education topics.

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The Education Writers Association

1001 Connecticut Ave., N.W., #310

Washington, D.C. 20036

(202) 429-9680

Fax (202) 872-4016

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